

**The Sunday of the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council  
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates in the period October 11 to 17.**

On the Sunday that falls on or immediately after the eleventh of this month,<sup>1</sup> we chant the service to the 350 holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which gathered in Nicea in 787 under the holy Patriarch Tarasius and during the reign of Empress Irene and her son, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, to refute the Iconoclastic heresy, which had received imperial support beginning with the Edict issued in 726 by the Emperor Leo the Isaurian. Many of the holy Fathers who condemned Iconoclasm at this holy Council died as Confessors and Martyrs for the Holy Icons during the second assault of Iconoclasm in the ninth century, especially during the reigns of Leo the Armenian and Theophilus.

*The Resurrection Dismissal Hymn and Kontakion in the Tone of the Week.*

*Dismissal Hymn of the Fathers, Plagal of Fourth Tone*

**M**OST glorified art Thou, O Christ our God, Who hast established our Fathers as luminous stars upon the earth, and through them didst guide us all to the true Faith. O Most Merciful One, glory be to Thee.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Russian usage, this service is chanted on the Sunday closest to the eleventh of October.

*Kontakion of the Fathers. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

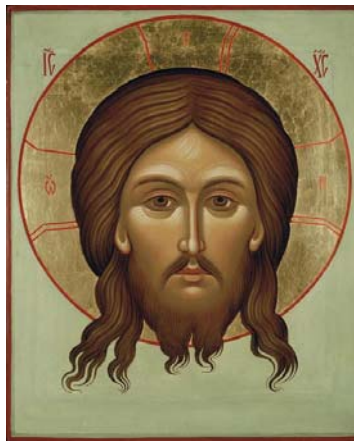
**T**HE preaching of the Apostles and the doctrines of the Fathers confirmed the one Faith in the Church. And wearing the garment of truth woven from the theology on high, she rightly divideth and glorifieth the great mystery of piety.

*Another Kontakion of the Fathers. Plagal of Second Tone*

**T**HE Son Who shone forth from the Father ineffably was born, twofold of nature, of a woman. Beholding Him, we deny not the image of His form; but depicting it piously, we revere it faithfully. And for this cause, the Church, in that it holdeth the true Faith, doth venerate the icon of Christ's incarnation.

Text: The Great Horologion © 1997 Holy Transfiguration Monastery Brookline, Massachusetts 02445  
Second Icon courtesy The Holy Nativity Convent Brookline, Massachusetts 02445

## THE SEVENTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL



## † THE ICON NOT MADE BY HANDS

Courtesy the Holy Nativity Convent  
Brookline, Massachusetts 02445

For a second time an Ecumenical Council meets in Nicea. The year is 787 and the assembled Fathers number 350. The Victory of Orthodoxy that occurred under the Emperor Michael and his mother the Empress Theodora who reigned in place of her infant son was fought, won, and sealed through that span of 56 years between 787 when the Council met and 843 when the Orthodox regained their Churches and monasticism flourished producing such Saints as Saint Irene Chrysovalantou. However, the period preceding her witnessed the martyrdoms of

countless monastics, and saw this new Triumph of Orthodoxy wrought by the Lord through such saints as John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite, and Stephen the New.

The Fathers of the Seventh Council and their predecessors stood firm in the Orthodox Faith and faced difficulties similar to those that the Church faces today. We see nothing today that the Fathers did not face then. So far, we “have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb.12:4). When we properly view their martyric struggle, it becomes plain that the Lord our Saviour has already marked out quite clearly the contemporary lines of battle.

If we are ready to confess and to defend the Orthodox Faith today, and this confession and defence the Fathers tell us is the highest virtue, it would behoove us to imitate the successful strategies and tactics the Fathers used when they took the field of battle and carried the day in the struggle with the heretics who slew countless monastics and destroyed the Icons.

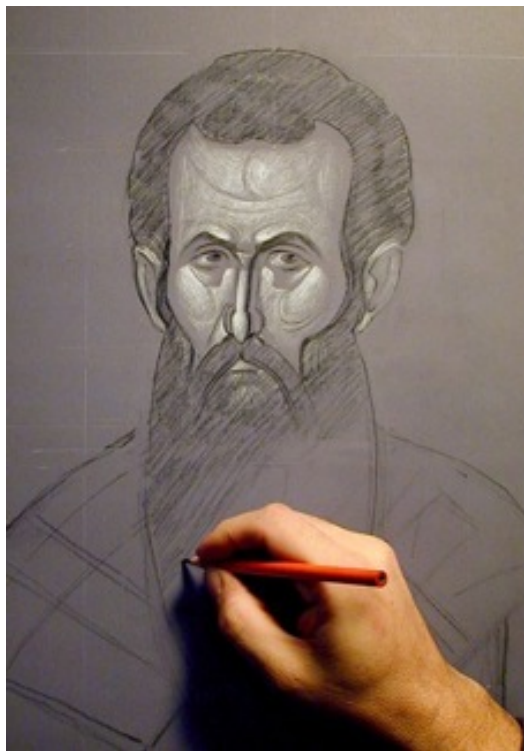
We may then be able to appreciate all the more readily the riches they have conveyed to us from the Lord’s own lips and hands in His uncreated energies, and then, with thanks, to receive these treasures, joyfully sealing them in our hearts, our consciences, and our lives.

Saint Photius the Great tells us what happened during the controversy between the Orthodox and the heretics, the Icon-breakers (Iconoclasts). His parents were martyrs for the Orthodox Faith at the hands of the Icon-breakers, and he himself had been persecuted for his defence of the holy Icons. In his letter to his Godson, Boris, King of Bulgaria, and in his other writings, Saint Photius identifies the Jews as those who instigated those who were behind those who destroyed the holy Icons.



Courtesy Saint Gregory of Sinai Monastery  
[www.gsinai.com](http://www.gsinai.com)

What do the holy Icons say? How do they speak to mankind? Iconography is a sacred art. Select persons, men and women, receive a blessing from their Bishop to become Iconographers. They conduct their labors with prayer and fasting, not only at the beginning of a project, but throughout its execution. They pledge themselves to labor in the mastery of iconographic techniques, construction of the boards, or, in the case of frescos, preparation of the walls of buildings, of the selection and mixing of paints, the care of brushes and the other related tools that are used in order faithfully to portray the traditional iconographic archetypes. An iconographer's draughtsmanship of the lines and his skill in executing a God-pleasing harmony of the colors demands that he be spiritually quiet. This is a labor of love for those who are devoted to holy Tradition. The eye can detect their ardor in every brush stroke.



Fresco Sketch of Saint Basil the Great  
Courtesy Saint Gregory of Sinai Monastery  
[www.gsainai.com](http://www.gsainai.com)

Saint John of Damascus said, "If you want to see my faith, I will show you my Icons." St. Paul writes, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Since all icons are references from the icon of Christ, our faith rests upon the fulfilment of the Prophets' words, as in the prophecy of Baruch, speaking as though the prophesied event had already happened, that God showed "Himself

on earth and conversed with men” (4:37). The faith of Baruch and of the other Prophets is “the substance of things hoped for.”

Beloved, the Icon of Christ is not only “the substance of things hoped for,” as in the case of the Prophets, the Icon of Christ is also “the evidence of things not seen” since in the Θεάνθρωπος we are granted the vision “of things not seen.” We see man united to God, we see our humanity on the Throne at the right hand of God, we witness the fulfilment of every prophetic word, and the blessing of every righteous hope, the redemption of every human tear; yes, “the evidence of things not seen” is, in the face of Jesus Christ, plainly before our eyes.

God’s face, the countenance of the Θεάνθρωπος (Theánthropos)<sup>2</sup> is “the evidence of things not seen.” The Icon of Christ is the evidence that the uncreated Son of God has united Himself in the womb of the Theotokos with our depictable nature and become man so that we might become God. The icon-breaking heretics set out to destroy the Orthodox faith from the face of the earth; this is what those who destroyed the icons wanted to do.

Going back to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the holy Icons do not depict the essence of the Son of God. There is a distinction between the divine and the human in the Θεάνθρωπος. The essence of the Son of God is uncreated and undepictable. What the holy Icons do graphically represent is the human, created nature that the Son assumed from His Virgin Mother. The divine essence is never portrayed; it cannot be described or defined in any way. God is not a being. As Saint Gregory Palamas cries out, “If God is being, then being is not God.” The divinity is nameless and superessential. The created human nature of Christ, distinct from and unmingled with the divine, uncreated nature, is what we see depicted in the Icon.

We offer veneration, or relative worship, to the Icon and this veneration passes on to the uncreated archetype. In the precision granted by the Greek language, we offer προσκυνέω, veneration, to the Icon but not λατρεύω, the worship due to God alone.

The holy Icons have been with the Church from the start. The Cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant are the first Icons of Angels (Ex. 25:19 LXX). The first Icon of Christ was made by the Lord Himself for King Abgar of Edessa in the Holy Napkin (Celebrated August 16). We can now see icons of The Three Holy Children on the walls of the catacombs of Rome.

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<sup>2</sup> English has a word, ‘the God-man’ but it does not bear the meaning of the Greek *Theánthropos*. For the most part, we in the West still, without knowing it, see things from Augustine of Hippo’s semi-Nestorian interpretation of Christ as ‘God-and-man.’ A more attentive listening to the Church’s hymnody on Christ in His Feasts and on the Theotokos in hers would help to heal our hearts and minds of this serious misperception.

The Icons are themselves are the Victory of Orthodoxy. Some people lament the removal of the Icons from Churches and monasteries into museums where they are viewed as 'religious art.' But we also hear a heartening response to such a complaint: "The Icons are our missionaries; they spread Orthodoxy to so many people."

This is true; Iconography is Theology in Color, as someone has said. They stand, as does the Church, outside secular time holding before each viewer that which, as Incomprehensible, as Ineffable, as Unchanging, changes and transfigures our lives: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

The Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council are far from being silent witnesses; attend now to their unending Chant:

For not by laboring and sweating,  
not by fatigue and suffering,  
but merely as being beloved of God,  
we received what we have received.

And to our God be Glory.  
AMEN.



**ICON OF THE †HREE CHILDREN  
FOUND IN THE CATACOMBS OF ROME  
SOURCE UNKNOWN**